



Supreme Court of Georgia

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CHIEF JUSTICE TO SUSPEND JURY TRIALS

Atlanta, December 22, 2020 – In an emergency session today with state judicial leaders, Chief Justice Harold D. Melton said he will sign an order tomorrow, Dec. 23, that will suspend jury trials statewide in the face of the disturbing spread of the coronavirus.

The order will amend the most recent order he signed on Dec. 9, which extended for the ninth time the Statewide Judicial Emergency he first declared on March 14, 2020. State law allows the Chief Justice to extend the emergency in 30-day increments, and he has done so each month. It also allows him to modify an order within 30 days. The order he signed in mid-October lifted the suspension on jury trials that had been in place.

But in today's call, the Chief Justice said the rapid escalation of COVID-19 cases across the state requires that the judiciary pull back on the resumption of jury trials. The order he will sign tomorrow will say that jury trials are suspended "at least until February." Those jury trials already in progress may continue to conclusion at the discretion of the presiding judge, the order will say. The order will continue to urge that all proceedings that can practicably and lawfully be done remotely be done that way, and it will continue to require that any in-person proceedings comply with public health guidance. Chief Justice Melton said that decisions on what else should be restricted to protect public health will be at the local judges' discretion.

“The recent surge in this deadly virus has required us to slow down the effort to resume jury trials and to rethink other in-person proceedings in Georgia,” Chief Justice Melton said. “We are hopeful that with the advent of vaccines and their widespread availability, the end of the virus is in sight and sometime in the coming months, we will be able to return to a robust schedule of jury trials and all court functions. But now is not the time for full-blown operations.”